

## THE MILL ON THE RIVER

By KONRAD BERCOVICI

It was an old mill, Dimitru's mill on the Bistritza river. It had been run by the family of Dimitru long before any other mills had ever been put up on either side of the river, all through the Moldava country. The dykes and the water wheels were of old oak, cut from trees in the forest when the country paid yearly tribute to Turkey and was ruled by the Fanariots of Stamboul.

Within the mill were fifty pairs of millstones which, grinding wheat and corn, had themselves been ground so thin that they had no weight to mill any more the hard grain growing in that part of Rumania. These old millstones were the pride of the family, for not another mill in the country could show so many.

When anybody said anything about Dimitru's mill or the manner in which he milled, the tall, black-bearded, wide-chested, brown-eyed miller would stretch to his full height, and pounding the left side of his chest with his right hand, he would cry:

"Look at these stones! Fifty pair of stones have ground flour in this mill. I myself have used five pair. This is the sixth one on the shaft."

Those millstones were like arms of the escutcheon of a nobleman, which no man was allowed to impugn.

At the inn Dimitru was looked upon with respect by the peasants. He was one of the oldest inhabitants of the village. Indeed, the village itself, clustered as it was about the mill, was known as Dimitru's Mill Village. For not only did they mill flour there, but they cut logs that were let down from the heights of the Carpathians early every spring, and they pressed oil out of pumpkin seeds, and carded wool, and even worked things out at a lathe which

Dimitru himself had installed there; at first merely to satisfy a whim he had had after he had first seen a lathe work in another village, and then, as he grew more proficient, to make furniture for most of the people in the village. Back of the mill there was a shop in which carts and wheels were made, and chairs and tables; and even small husking machines, patterned after one that had been bought in Austria. The water wheel provided the power for all the work.

The inn, the church, the school, the mayor's office, the situation of every building was reckoned by its distance from the mill. During the winter, when there was only little work to do, the elders of the village would assemble in the mill, and watching the still in which the mash of plums and pears, grown in the neighborhood, was distilled into spirits, watching the drops fall into the receptacle that sat under the long copper worm, they would tell the tales they had heard from their mothers and grandmothers, who in turn had heard them from their parents and grandparents — stories of visitations of wolves; tales of sorceries, of witches which had risen up riding in the air on broomsticks, and of horses that could run so fast they disappeared from sight in less time than it takes to blink an eye. They recalled the different battles — battles with the Turks, battles with the Russians, battles with the Hungarians; births of five-legged calves and two-headed chickens, and the reappearances of deceased men whose ghosts were forever roaming about this, that, and the other place.

Dimitru repeated an old tale of his own family, of how the stones of his mill had stopped once by themselves while some corn was being ground. From behind the stones groaned a voice which was recognized as being the voice of Vasili, Vasili Yoan Stefans, who had died only a few months before.

"Mill not this corn," the voice had called. "It has been stolen from my granary by Panait, the Greek.



Give it back to my wife lest my children starve, this winter."

The millstones refused to budge or turn until every grain of flour which had already been ground was swept out clean and returned to the bag from which the corn had been taken. And even then the stones would not move, although the water wheel turned and everything else was in motion. The wool was being carded, the logs were being sawn; only the millstones refused to turn. Not until the widow had been called and the corn belonging to her had been returned, and not until Panait had confessed to stealing the grain, had the stones turned again.

And there were many tales, similar to that one, centered about the mill. For the mill had also refused to grind grain when the Russians had invaded the country a century ago, and had refused to grind when the Turks had come. It was the mill on the Bistritza, which ground wheat and corn, and pressed oil and sawed logs and turned the lathe only for those belonging to the land. And Dimitru was the owner of that mill.

Dimitru had a son, and a daughter whom he had married off when very young. The son, like all the sons back in the family, was preparing himself to take over the mill of his father when the time should come. For even if he were to take a wife while his father was yet alive, there was enough room for him and his wife in the house. And even if he were to raise a family, there was enough room and enough field for him to pasture his dowry of cows and sheep, and to raise enough fodder for them. He had indeed already taken off a good deal of the burden of his father, for while the old man busied himself with his cart shop, preferring the lathe to the mill, George was in complete charge of the stones. And he was as good a miller as his father.

But although he joked and played around with most of the young girls who came to the mill, although he danced with all of them at the inn, teasing, singing, joking with

them, there was not one who could say that he was giving her preference over the others. Tall, dark, with big brown eyes, the lashes of which were always covered with a thin white powder, the dark, tufty brows looking like those of an old man because of a fine flour powder always on them, he was a good dancer, and his voice rose above the voices of the others when any singing was being done at the inn. At the wrestling matches on Sunday there were few youngsters who dared to match him. And he was gay and always happy. And it was known that although he was allowed to take one tenth of the flour he milled, in payment for milling it, from everybody, he took only half that amount, and sometimes not even that, from the poor and the widows of the country. Indeed, many a widow had brought half a bag of corn and returned home with a full bag of corn flour, George yelling at the top of his voice, when the widow claimed there had been some mistake, that he was an honest miller.

"You have brought one bag of corn and not two, widow of Jorga," he would silence the protesting woman, not giving her any chance or time to explain herself.

"You have brought one bag, and I know you have brought only one bag! Am I a miller, or a thief, or what!" he would shout, and show great anger, as he would push her out of the mill.

One winter night, while the wind was howling, and the water wheel, raised from the frozen river, was squeaking and groaning, and the storm was beating savagely against the windows and doors of the mill, one of the villagers sitting about the walled-in stove, in the ashes of which the potatoes were being baked, asked:

"George, whom are you going to marry?"

Dimitru gave his son no time to answer. "He will marry the one who will bring him a good enough dowry," he answered, instead of his son.

One by one they passed in review all the marriageable daughters of the village. They knew all of them. And



when Dimitru had shaken his head to the last one, the *staroste*, trembling and with shaking fists, thundered into the face of the man:

"Is it, then, the death of one of the married men that you are waiting for, to marry your son?"

George had been making fun of all that was said. He had taken it all as a joke. But to the thundering voice of the *staroste* he replied:

"I wish every one long life in this village, and in every other one. When I am ready to marry, I shall make my own choice."

"Indeed, my son wants to get married to some pauper. I have given six pair of oxen as dowry to my daughter, six pair of oxen and one hundred gold pieces. But he may want to marry some pauper!"

"A time will come," George answered. "My time will come. But it shall be of my own choice, not of anybody else's."

"Well said," spoke the gray-bearded *staroste*.

Old Dimitru remained silent.

Then they all sat down to sample the new prune juice that was dripping from the copper worm. It was better that such discussion end in joy, so they sang their saddest songs.

Finally George remarked, on looking toward the idle stones, "It is a pity they should be idle so long."

George was never happy but when the stones turned around.

"This is a water mill," his father answered. "When the Bistritza freezes, the mill freezes."

"I know, father." He was a miller and lived only when the mill lived. "But it is a pity that the stones should not be turning when the Bistritza freezes."

"If it were a windmill, you would be saying half the time the same thing," another man of the group mused.

"If it were a horse mill, the mill would not be turning at night," another man said in jest.

Whereupon one of the men, who had served in the army, and had been far away in a large city, began to speak about a large, steam-power mill which he had seen on his travels. A steam mill. One prepared logs to fire the engine during the summer, and then in winter one had the mill go whether the river was frozen or not.

George mused impatiently, "What a pity the Bistritza freezes!"

During the first month of the winter, after the river had frozen, he had had some work to do. He had sharpened every tooth and smoothed out the grain of the stones, until the teeth were as sharp as steel edges. He had cleaned and adjusted and readjusted everything. He had made it all ready to go, and now he was anxious to hear the whirl and turn of the mill, grinding and crunching all that was shoved into it.

"What a pity the Bistritza freezes!"

His father looked at him and then replied: "It is a thing I am going to put into my will, that this is a water mill and it shall remain so. This mill has ground fifty pair of stones."

George was tired of always hearing the same thing. He left the company to go to his own room above the shaft.

Soon after, the peasants tightened their wolf-fur coats about them and returned to their homes, after wishing one another good luck. It was snowing and storming. Wolves were prowling on the road.

Dimitru still pottered about in the cart shop, working on a new corn husking machine he was trying to perfect; then, tired, he, too, went to his room, where he lay wondering what was to become of the mill after he was no longer there. Was it to be desecrated? Was it to be forever forgotten as the water mill on the Bistritza? Was all the pride of generations to be sacrificed to that new thing of which the returned soldier had spoken? Outside the wind was howling, the lugubrious plaint of the hungry wolves was coming nearer and nearer, the wheel was creaking on its axle, straining the ropes that held it to the thick iron staples



embedded in the stone of the walls. Whom was that son of his to marry if he wanted to marry of his own choice? It had not been so with him. His father had chosen him a bride, decided on the dowry, and married him off. Yet he had been happy! George should do as he had done. He was the father, the master. . . . With these thoughts the old man fell asleep.

Early that spring, after the river had broken, and the logs began to descend to the mill, and the wheel had begun again to turn, George, very busy and very happy, forgot all about the frozen months.

At the inn Dan, Petru's son, whose farm was across the river and who was reputed to be very wealthy, came to meet Dimitru, the miller, to talk over matters of matrimony between his daughter Veta and George. After the bottle of wine was between them, Dan opened the conversation.

"There is no other man would offer the dowry I offer. What say you?"

"I say that my son George must receive as much as I have given my daughter as dowry. Six pair of great oxen, one hundred gold pieces, and all the other things."

Dan, red-haired and easily excitable, rose from his chair. "Is my Veta a cripple?"

Dimitru answered calmly: "She is not . . . but George is a better man than the one who married my daughter."

They both sat down again. It was not fitting they should be heard quarreling by the others.

"Am I a miller to be able to give such dowry?" Dan remonstrated. Then as an afterthought he added, "One should be able to accumulate wealth by building a mill the other side of the river so people won't have to lose time rowing back and forth."

"The mill is on this side," Dimitru answered. "It is on this side."

"Since millers ask such dowry, it may come to pass that there will be a mill on the other side also."

Upon that the two men left the inn.

On reaching the mill Dimitru asked his son, "What say you about Veta, Dan's daughter?"

George was busy cleaning the flour funnels. He was as if snow-clad. He wiped his face with his sleeve and answered: "It is long since I have seen her. They have their own inn on the other side. I remember her well, however, beautiful and strong."

"You will marry her," Dimitru announced briefly.

"Who says I will?" yelled George. He was furious.

"I say so. I have talked to her father about dowry and things."

"Marry her, then, yourself. I shall do my own choosing when I am ready."

"You will do what I say, George."

"In the mill, because the mill is yours."

"And do you know what will happen if you don't marry Veta? Dan will put up a mill on the other side and starve our stones. Do you understand?"

George paled. But the next instant he stopped the whirr of the mill to be better heard and said to his father:

"Even though she be the fairest on earth, I say 'no.' I am not a horse or an ox to be marketed that way. Let him build ten mills."

Upon that he returned to his work, while the old man muttered, "You will do as I say," and went to his shop.

A few days later bricks were being brought in big carts and deposited on the other side of the river. Bricks and beams and lumber, and gypsies came to dig the foundation of a large building.

Dimitru's heart stopped beating when he saw that Dan really intended to build a mill. He sent word he wanted to speak to him, but Veta's father refused to come. The old miller could not sleep nights, nor could he work at his lathe. The noise of the work across the river maddened him. Another mill was rising. Another mill, and his son seemed not to care. He asked George to go to the dance across



the river and get better acquainted with Veta. . . . The mill had to be stopped. George refused. He would not be traded away. He would take a wife of his own choice, mill or no mill. Veta was out of the question.

When the foundation had risen above a man's height from the ground, Dimitru, compelling his son to come along, rowed across the Bistritza to have a talk with Dan. He found the man busily engaged in giving orders, flushed by the activity about him.

"What is it you are doing, Dan, Petru's son?" Dimitru asked, as if he did not know.

"As you see, my neighbor across the water — putting up a mill for the people on this side of the river, so that they shall not have to row across to your mill."

"But a good half of my milling comes from your side of the river," Dimitru answered.

"That is just why I am putting up the mill," Dan replied sarcastically.

"But this is impossible! My mill has been there for over a hundred years," remonstrated Dimitru. "Are you going to starve the stones?"

"To each one his own way of doing," replied the would-be miller. "But young men demand such dowries, nowadays, they can only be made by milling and not by farming."

"But we have been millers for hundreds of years," Dimitru insisted.

"I hope my grandchildren will be able to say the same thing about this mill," Dan retorted. "Perhaps things will change, and people will begin to row from your side of the river to this mill, for I shall mill cheaper than you do."

"So that is what you want to do," cried Dimitru. "Starve me out!"

"You see," Dan retorted, "I have only daughters in my house. And the young men about this place want big dowries, which only millers can give to their daughters."

While the two men were speaking, Veta, Dan's daughter,

came riding upon a small horse. George raised his fur cap as he saw her, and approached to help her from the saddle. Instantly the two older men looked at each other with a look of understanding. Perhaps the problem was nearer a solution than they had just thought. The conversation between them lost its acridity, as they saw the two youngsters together, Dimitru saying:

"It is not a mill that I should like for my son as dowry. He already has one."

To which Dan answered, "I have not offered the mill as dowry, have I?"

They tried conversation on other subjects, but it always reverted to what one had to offer as dowry, and what the other one would be willing to accept for his son. In the midst of that, Dimitru, having remarked a too great interest in his son for the girl, abruptly decided to leave for the other shore.

"Go on and work your mill, son. This is no time to idle. Come."

"Come dance at our inn," George urged Veta, as he jumped into the boat.

"There is a big dance at our inn to-morrow, Sunday," the girl answered.

Then the oars splashed in the water, and the boat was rowed across with vigorous strokes by father and son.

Late that night, as the two men were anchoring the water wheel over Sunday, the father said to his son:

"I shall ask as dowry that he stop working on his mill."

Instantly George rose to his full height and looked his father straight in the eye.

"You might have asked *mé*," George remonstrated, "for I happen not to wish to marry Veta."

"You do not?" Dimitru asked furiously. "But I do want you to marry her, and marry her you will. I shall not live to see the stones of my mill idle when they should be milling — live to see how the corn is rowed across the



river to be milled in the other mill, led by ungodly German wheels turning of themselves. For it is a steam mill he is putting up."

"This is certain," George answered, "you can not make me marry her."

Then he left his father and went to his room. He was furious. Because his father had spoken so compellingly, Veta, of whom he had thought rather agreeably, had lost her favor in his eyes. He was going to marry whom he pleased, and not because of fifty pair of dead stones that lay around there, requesting him to do otherwise.

The following day, Sunday, he went to the inn on his side of the river, in his best clothes, looking around for any likely girl whom he had not previously remarked, so that he could make love to her, knowing full well that his father was watching his every movement. In the midst of the dance Veta arrived. She was fairer than most of them, and she had put on her best garb. Upon her bare, full neck she wore her gold necklace, her white silk shawl hung down from the comb in her hair, and her high, well-modeled boots, that reached to her knees, were decorated with veins of red and green leather.

The old man smiled to himself when he saw her, sure that George could not resist her; she was so beautiful. He was also certain that she had come to dance with his son, sent probably by Dan, her father, who already regretted what he had done. Ah! He was not going to let Dan off so easily if he saw Veta loving his son.

But the girl seemed to pay no attention to George after a perfunctory greeting. At the dance she locked her arm into the arm of the son of the blacksmith and danced with him in the second, and third, and fourth dances, avoiding dancing with George. It enraged the old man. Seating himself near his son, who was resting between dances, he said,

"That shrew is trying to play with you."

"Nobody can play with me," George answered.

"She thinks that if she can make you love her, her father will get off with less dowry than he should pay."

"Who says I want her?" George answered.

At the end of the fourth dance Veta beckoned to George to come outside; she wanted to talk to him. He followed her out quietly.

Once outside, the girl told him rapidly: "My father wants to compel me to marry you. I don't want to."

"And mine wants to compel me to marry you, and I don't want to," George answered.

"Then it is understood," Veta replied, after looking the boy straight in the face. "Are we cattle to be married against our will? We do not want it. I always knew you to be a man, George."

"No, we do not want it." And they shook hands on that.

They reëntered the inn as unobtrusively as they had gone out. George watched her walk ahead of him and thought:

"What a spirited girl! And that fool of a father thinks he can compel her to marry anybody she does not want to!"

Veta and George danced together the last dance before parting. But it was the blacksmith's son who rowed her back across the river. George returned to his mill, whistling loudly, happy with a happiness he did not understand.

The following day the miller received a visit from Dan. The bricklayers had meanwhile been stopped on the work. The two men sat down in a corner of the mill and began talking together in a roundabout way. The question was, however, soon driven to the point. Dan was already regretting that he had involved himself so deeply. Now he had to buy the machinery. The price was enormous. He was already losing confidence in the quality of the mill. He had also begun to doubt whether the people on this side of the shore would be willing to bring him their wheat and corn to be milled, and thus forsake the old mill of which



they were so proud. He even doubted now whether the people on his side of the shore would all give him their trade!

"I let things stand just as they are. That is loss enough. That is Veta's dowry."

"Should I pay for your folly?" Dimitru demanded.

"Not at all," Dan answered. "The dowry is the existence of your mill."

"That is no dowry," Dimitru answered, reassured now because the man had come to him.

"Maybe it is a larger one than you think," Dan replied hotly. "I have spent a fortune already, but if you want, I shall see the thing to the end."

"Do what you please," Dimitru answered.

Dan rowed himself home, where he called his bricklayers and started immediately building the mill.

The old miller watched his son out of the corner of his eye. Then he approached and told him.

"He says he would stop work on the mill and that would be your dowry."

"As far as I am concerned, he may complete six mills," George answered.

"Do you mean to tell me that you would live to see with your own eyes the ruin of this one?" his father asked, and clenched his fists.

"Am I to be the father of children by a mother I have not loved?" George answered.

"It is saving the mill!" the father yelled at the top of his voice. "My mill! The mill of my fathers! The mill of my grandfathers! The mill of my forefathers! It is the mill on the Bistritza! Do you understand?"

"It is nothing but bricks and stones," George answered quietly, "and I am of flesh and blood."

There was no further talk between the two men. They walked about their work mutely the whole week.

On Saturday the old miller rowed across to talk matters over with Dan. He was certain that he could overcome

his son's objections if he but drove a favorable bargain with the father of the girl. Of course, it would have been such a tremendous help if George had exerted himself and made the girl love him. Still, he had no doubt he would succeed. Dan was happy to see the miller's boat. The mill was costing a good deal more to complete than he had at first planned. It had swallowed up a good deal more than he had intended to give as Veta's dowry. Yet he maintained a defiant attitude and was urging the men to work faster and faster, raising his voice, knowing well that the other man would hear every word.

"Move faster! Move faster! This mill is going to turn when the summer is over! Move faster! Move faster!" he urged the gypsy bricklayers working under him.

Conversation started again between the two men, and this time, Dan, who felt that he was in the stronger position, waited until the other made an offer.

Finally Dimitru said: "You stop working on this mill. You give George the four stones you have here, which we can use in our mill, and you give my son four pair of oxen and five thousand leis as dowry."

"This mill is going to be completed," Dan answered, turning his back to talk to the bricklayers.

"Put on some speed, men! Move! Move!"

After a while he turned about and said: "Five thousand leis! I have spent five thousand leis this last week building here!"

"Do you think that I will accept four pair of oxen for my son, for that is all that it will be, four pair of oxen? Must I pay for your folly?"

"The mill will be completed."

There was a long discussion between the two men. Ultimately the five thousand leis were halved, on condition that nobody should know anything about it, while the four pair of oxen were admitted.

Dimitru had no sooner taken his departure than Dan dismissed the workingmen again. He went into the house



to talk to his daughter. He first told the news to his wife, who had been set against the building of the mill from the very first. For wholly apart from the fact that it was risking quite a deal of money, she was loath to see a quarrel spring up between her family and that of the miller across the river.

But she received the news without great enthusiasm. Veta had been crying the whole day in her room. She refused to be treated as if she were cattle. Why should her father barter her away against her will? Because he had entangled himself in the building of a mill of which he had no use, and which he did not want to complete?

Dan received no answer when he called for her at the door of her room. But he heard a splash in the river near by and saw her rowing across furiously to the other side of the Bistritza. She came to the door of Dimitru's mill. Her father watched her from his door. She remained outside for a few minutes, until George came out. Then she took hold of his hand and dragged him away somewhere behind the mill, to talk to him.

"They can not sell us as if we were cattle," Veta began spiritedly.

"No, they can not," George answered. "Those two old people have no consideration for our feelings. I may be loving elsewhere, so may you."

"I? I?" Veta interrupted. "Well, maybe."

"The old man was just telling me," George informed her, "that he had settled everything. He has agreed upon the dowry with your father. I have to do as he says, or he will take me off his will and throw me out of the house."

"And what will you do?" Veta asked compassionately.

"He may cut me out of a hundred wills and a thousand mills," George cried out passionately.

She gripped both his hands in hers, and they looked into one another's eyes admiringly. They admired each other's pluck and willingness to suffer for a principle.

When Veta returned to her home she found her father indifferent. It enraged her. He did not care what she thought. He should see.

He did not tell her anything, sure as he was that the bargain was as good as closed. But when Dimitru did not show up that night, bringing his son to celebrate, as they had agreed, Dan was furious. The table was set. The nearest of the family had been called. They were shamed.

"Those two millers on the other side think they have me by the throat," he railed, "because that fool girl rowed across! It is because of you, Veta. They think because you have gone to talk to him that he can obtain any dowry he wants from me. Not a penny more will he have! Not a penny!" he thundered. "And Monday we start building on the mill again!"

They had been shamed. Even Veta felt the insult. . . . She did not know how it could have been otherwise. Late that night she heard loud voices coming across the waters from the old mill. Father and son were quarreling.

Early Monday morning the gypsies were called together again, and the bricks were laid furiously and in haste, one on top of the other. It hurt George to think that the girl was suffering so. He was thinking of the bitter words her father was telling her. He should not! That fool of a Dan might even beat her! If he, George, ever found that out . . .

But she was not to be bartered away. And how proud she was that George was willing to be stricken from his father's will, perhaps driven from his home, because of a principle!

Watched closely, the following Sunday she could not row across to the other inn. She would have liked so much to talk to him! She went to dance at her own inn, and as the youngsters danced with her, she looked at them closely and measured every one. Would Stephan, the wheelwright's son, who danced with her now, have shown as much spirit as George did? She was certain he would



not. And would Jorga have refused what his father bade him do? She doubted it. And even the son of the priest, of the *popa*, who was the school-teacher of the village, would not have dared to do otherwise than his father commanded. She wished George was there, so that she could tell him how much she admired him.

At the inn on the other side of the river George waited impatiently. The girls about him did not measure up to Veta. All their fathers would have had to do was to come together, agree on the dowry, and the girls would have nothing to say, like cattle; even if their hearts were already pledged elsewhere. Not so, Veta. He waited for her to come. When she did not appear, he began to think she was being mistreated by her father. Dan was an excitable, red-haired man. Undoubtedly she was being persecuted, perhaps punished by her parents. She would be present otherwise.

The first floor of the other mill was almost ready. It was nothing but bricks and stones, like his mill, bricks and stones for which the older people were willing to barter away the happiness of the younger ones.

When the inn was closed and Veta had not appeared, he rowed across the Bistritza and stole up stealthily beneath her window. The house was in darkness. Only from one little window, below, shimmered the flat light of the little oil candle under the ikon in Dan's room.

George called softly under Veta's room and waited. A light showed a second afterward behind the window. Then a head stuck out. He greeted her without saying a word. She answered, and he beckoned her out. He waited a long time, for she had to take many precautions not to awaken anybody in the house, before she came down in her bare feet and with only a rug thrown about her shoulders.

They went hurriedly behind a clump of trees. George looked into her eyes and found them red.

"You have been crying, Veta," he told her.

She did not answer.

"Have you been at the dance?" he asked her.

"I went," she answered, "but there was not much joy in dancing. Have you been at the dance?"

"I was in the inn, but hardly danced at all — hardly danced, thinking of what you might be doing."

"Oh, I could not come across, George," she said. "You understand, I could not."

"I understand. That savage father of yours! If he dared lay his hands on you . . ."

"That he won't do. But that they should want to trade us like cattle," Veta began again, trembling with fury.

"They have found their match," George answered.

Suddenly several torches were lit in Veta's room. Scared, the girl pointed them out to the young man.

"God! They will find out I am not in my room! If he finds me here, he will kill you."

Then the voice of Dan was heard as he called at the top of his voice, "Veta! Veta! Veta!"

She flattened herself against the young man, who encircled her with his arms.

"Do not fear. He shall not touch you."

Dan and his wife were now looking everywhere, calling "Veta! Veta! Veta! Veta!"

The old man had his gun in his hands. He was cursing and swearing as he searched.

"He will kill you if he sees you," Veta said to George.

"It is of you I am thinking," he whispered softly in her ears.

The boat in which he had come was hidden in a cove only a few hundred feet away from them. The other people of the house were by now up and making a considerable noise. People from near-by houses came out to see what it was about. At a sign from George, Veta began to crawl after him, under the bushes, holding on to one of his hands, until they reached the boat. With one powerful stroke George



shoved the little craft to the middle of the river where it was taken and carried down-stream toward his own mill.

The next moment a loud report from Dan's gun echoed through the hills. People were yelling. Women were crying. The dogs howled. But in a few more strokes the boat reached the other shore and George, protecting Veta by remaining behind her, jumped over the wall. He almost carried her to the door of the mill.

The mill was closed. He beat upon the door with his fists.

After what seemed an age his father's head stuck out of an upper window and asked, "Who is there?"

"It is I, George," the son answered. "Open."

"You are no son of mine," the old man answered. He had evidently been drinking heavily. "You are no son of mine, and this door is closed to you!"

People gathered about them. The noise was terrific.

"Open the door!" George yelled at the top of his voice. "Open the door, for I have brought a bride with me!"

And he turned Veta so that she should be seen by his father.

"Bride indeed! And is that the way your bride is attired when you bring her home? And what is the meaning of the hurrying lights, and the gunshots across the river, and all the people?"

"Open the door! Her father is seeking Veta to kill her!"

"He will never pay a dowry now," moaned the old miller as he opened the door.

They had hardly gone in when Dan, too, entered the door that had been left open. He was still holding his gun by the barrel, and put out his hand toward his daughter. The villagers burst in in their night-clothes.

"Call the priest!" George yelled as he held the old man away at arm's length. "This is my wedding night!"

There still stands an unfinished mill on the other side of the Bistritza. The four millstones have long since been thrown into the discard, worn too light to mill the heavy,

hard grain of the district. The unfinished mill is known throughout the whole neighborhood as "The Miller's Dowry."

### KONRAD BERCOVICI

As this story has doubtless convinced the reader, Konrad Bercovici knows Rumania intimately and writes of it with a native understanding. He was born in Dobrudja, Rumania, June 23, 1882, and his first story was printed in a Rumanian magazine when he was twelve years old. He has lived in Paris and other European cities and now makes New York his home. His best stories have as their background the life of the peasants in Rumania, their feast days and daily work, the traditions of their tribes, the simple, elemental emotions which motivate their lives. One may know Mr. Bercovici from his stories as a man who hates all shams, loves the mysteries and beauties of nature, and has a feeling for music whether in word or instrument.

### SUGGESTIONS FOR STUDY

1. What is the theme of this story? What characteristic in George and Veta is emphasized? Is this a characteristic of all young people or of these only? How do circumstances contrive to emphasize this trait in George and Veta?
2. Find references in the story which show that the mill was "the pride of generations" in the family of Dimitru. What figure of speech is contained in Dimitru's words: "Dan will put up a mill on the other side and starve our stones?" How does this figure express the feeling of Dimitru for his mill? How does George show the same feeling? Describe his methods of helping the poor who brought corn to the mill.
3. This story makes the Rumanian country and its people very real to us. Describe Dimitru and his position among the peasants. In the description of Veta at the dance, one may get a good picture of the Rumanian peasant costume. Some student with artistic ability may draw or paint such a picture. Others may bring to class



pictures of Rumanian peasants from the *National Geographic Magazine*. Read other Rumanian stories by Bercovici and report on these in class, reading aloud selected portions which give good pictures of the country or the people.

4. Note Dimitru's pride in his fifty worn millstones. Write *The Story the Millstone Told*, imagining that one worn old stone comes to life and tells how once it stopped suddenly upon hearing a voice cry, "Mill not this corn." Several pupils might take this subject, each writing a different tale. Another good theme subject might be "*Dimitru Tells of His Son's Wedding*." Dimitru at the inn telling the story in his own way suggests an interesting picture.

*Other Short Stories by Bercovici:*

*The Beggar of Alcazar*

*Seed*

*Ghitza*

*Flood*

*Millstones*

*Steel against Steel*

*The Law of the River*

*Stories with a foreign background:*

*The Rose of the Ghetto* — Israel Zangwill

*Natalka's Portion* — Rose Cohen

*Our Lady's Juggler* — Anatole France

*The Last Class* — Alphonse Daudet

*A Lear of the Steppes* — Ivan Turgenev

*The Thief* — Feodor Dostoyevski

*The Shot* — Alexander Pushkin